

Opening the Gate by catgall

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Mystery, Supernatural

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-11-23 16:49:35

Updated: 2017-11-23 16:49:35

Packaged: 2019-12-17 05:00:34

Rating: T

Chapters: 2

Words: 6,316

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Billy Hargrove finds himself in the Upside Down. Max and the gang team up to save her stepbrother. Features exploration of the Upside Down, character development for some minor characters, and Mileven cuteness. More chapters already in the proofreading stage. New to fanfiction, this is my first time publishing a story and I'm trying to get better, so I'd appreciate honest reviews

1. Chapter 1: The Crash

"Ugh," Billy Hargrove grunted as he settled the bar back on its racks. He sat up and inhaled, shaking his head and letting out a loud "Woo!" as he stood and started for the white wicker mirror above his dresser. Bobbing his head and singing along to the ZZ Top song blasting from his speakers, he celebrated his new rep max by spending the next several minutes watching himself flex his glistening muscles. He was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Billy," his stepmom Susan called from the hallway, "dinner will be ready in five!"

"Alright, I'll be right there!" he snapped back, rolling his eyes. Billy had loathed Susan from the day his father first brought her home. He didn't know why; he really had no reason to. She kept his dad busy and often away from Billy, which was all he'd wished for since his mother left. However, there was something about Susan that he just hated. Maybe it was her capacity to love the piece of trash that was his father, or maybe he just didn't like the sound of her voice. Regardless, he had learned to be civil around her, lest he face his dad's wrath. Luckily, she never gave him any shit.

Billy grabbed the blue towel sitting by his weight bench and pressed his face into it, wiping away the sweat and grabbing a sleeveless shirt to throw on. He stumbled into the kitchen to find his dad and stepsister Max already at the table. Susan brought out a large pan of macaroni and cheese and a plate of pork chops. She turned toward the kitchen to retrieve the rice and gravy while Billy poured himself a glass of water.

Max eyed him, not sure what she was really looking for. Since the incident back in November, he never bothered her, even when she knew she was doing something he wouldn't approve of. If she was a jerk like her stepbrother she might have tried to take advantage of that, but she wasn't. They never spoke of what happened that night in Will Byers's house, but nothing ever needed to be said. It was clear in the way that he averted his gaze any time their eyes met that he had received her message. Since school let out for the summer, they drove in silence a few days a week to the arcade on Billy's way to work,

then in silence again home. That was her only interaction with her stepbrother, and as far as she was concerned, her life was better for it.

"How was work today, Billy?" his dad inquired, breaking the silence as he wiped the gravy from his brown mustache.

"Fine," Billy responded, "not a very busy day." He had learned to say just enough to not come across as disrespectful, but also nothing that could inspire further conversation.

Billy knew he was so close to being free from the shitty Indiana town and the even shittier home life he had spent the past year in. After carrying the crappy high school team that he played for here in Hawkins to the 1985 Indiana State Quarter Finals and being named season MVP, he accepted a scholarship to go play basketball for Fresno State in the fall. Though he played it cool, Billy was ecstatic for the opportunity to go back to his home state for college. He knew that he could have gone on to play with a more competitive team had they stayed back in California for his senior year, but there was no point in being angry about that anymore. He was almost free, and that was all that mattered.

He had taken a summer job at the automotive repair shop in town, fixing up cars and running errands for the owner, Mr. Lewis. It wasn't exciting work, but it earned him a paycheck and a reason to not be home during the long summer days. Dale Lewis liked the kid, and even let him work on his own car in his spare time. Billy loved that blue Camaro more than he loved his family, and he cared for it nearly as often as he lifted weights.

"We've been making plans for move-in day at Fresno, Billy," Susan started, smiling, "we thought it could be fun if the whole family drove you up there and helped you get settled in. We could make a weekend of it!"

"You really don't have to do that, Susan," Billy muttered, "It's a long drive and I can make it fine on my own." Billy began slicing his second pork chop in half and added, "Besides, Labor Day Weekend? Wouldn't that be the weekend before Max started school? I'm sure she doesn't want to spend it away from Lucas," he smirked.

"Shut up, Billy," Max shot across the table, "but mom, I really can't that weekend! Chief Hopper and Will's mom are taking us all camping!"

"Max," Susan sighed, "you know you can go camping any time, right? How many times will you be able to see your big brother off to college?"

"He is *not* my brother," Max insisted, "and he doesn't even *want* us there. Why should everyone be miserable just because you want to pretend we're a normal family?" she questioned, matter-of-factly.

"Maxine!" her mother started to gasp, then stopped. She put her face in her hands and sighed, then looked up at her husband.

Neil Hargrove eyed his stepdaughter and took a deep breath. He was never sure how to approach her, especially when she was angry, when her bright red hair seemed even brighter. "Honey," he said calmly to his wife, "I'm sure Billy would appreciate us all being there if you want to go. Isn't that right, son?"

It was a question, but he might as well have stated it. "Sure, dad," Billy said, still looking at his plate, "but Max shouldn't have to go if she doesn't want to."

"Since when do you give a damn about what I want, Billy?" she mumbled, "Since when does anyone?"

"I'm trying to be on your side here, dipshit," Billy spat at her, "why don't you quit while you're ahead?"

"Screw you," Max shot back.

"Maxine, if we go to California you are going with us. I don't even know these people you want to spend the weekend with, why would you think I would let you go anywhere with them?" Susan asked. Every family dinner seemed to go in this direction. All her mother wanted was for Max to get along with her new brother. Growing up, Susan's brother was her best friend. He was still there for her whenever she reached out to him, even from all the way back in California. She knew it could never be the same for Max and Billy,

but that didn't stop her from hoping it could. "Also, the next time you use foul language at this dinner table you'll be grounded for a week, is that clear?"

Max wasn't sure why this was the issue she had decided to let get to her. Shit like this happened all the time. Susan was always trying to be extra motherly to Billy, in some sad effort to make up for his dad being so violent towards him. Max knew she should feel bad for Billy too, but she resented him for always making things worse. And honestly, a mother was the opposite of what Billy wanted, but he knew he had to comply to appease his father. If there was anything Billy and Max could agree on, it was that the whole situation was messed up.

Max stood. "I'm done eating. I'm going for a ride," she said as she started for the door. Susan was so proud of the bike she and Neil had picked out together for her daughter as a Christmas present the past year. Gifting it to her was the first time she had seen Max seem truly happy since they arrived in Hawkins. She tried to stay present in her daughter's life, making sure she was finding friends and doing well at school, but it was hard when Max didn't want to let her. When Max went from "not even wanting to do Christmas this year" to asking for a bicycle and for her mother to bake a chocolate pie, it was quite the surprise. Susan wasn't sure what had changed, but she sent for a Schwinn catalog the very next day.

Now, Max biked everywhere. She was still working on getting her mom to let her bike to the arcade, so she could spend even less time with Billy, but her mother insisted Billy bring her, citing some fear about how fast people drove on that road or something. Before, Max thought she could zoom on her skateboard; the bike was an entire new level. She spent most warm summer evenings racing her friends Lucas and Dustin down the big hill outside Dustin's house. She always felt like she was flying. Still she kept her skateboard, to get her around at school- it was her calling card, after all.

She pulled the walkie talkie the boys had gifted her for Christmas out of her backpack and spoke into it, "Anybody around? It's Max. Over."

Max biked along the road in silence for a few minutes before hearing her friend Dustin respond, "Hey Max, we're just leaving Mike's house.

Lucas got our entire party trapped in a Greyhawk crypt for rolling a 1 on a perception check. Sonofabitch. Over."

Max couldn't help but giggle, even though she only understood half of what that meant. "You suck, Lucas! Over," she teased. She heard Lucas laughing over the static of the machine, before responding, "Yeah, yeah, what do you want, Max?"

After a moment, she heard Dustin and Will simultaneously shout, "You forgot to say over!" while Lucas started to defend himself.

"Are you guys done?" Max interrupted them, "I need to get away from my house. Want to meet up and let me kick your ass in a race, Dustin? Over."

"Hah, you wish! Will has to go home, but you can meet us over at my house and we can hang for a bit, or ride around, or whatever. Steve is babysitting tonight so we can do pretty much anything we want," Dustin suggested, "over."

"Sounds good boys, I'll see you soon. Over and out," Max said, before slipping her walkie talkie back into her backpack and pedaling faster.

Meanwhile, back at the Hargrove residence, Billy sat at the table with his dad and stepmom in silence, finishing his glass of water. Susan rose and took her and Max's plates to the kitchen, having not said anything since Max stormed out. She returned for Billy and Neil's dishes, still not speaking.

"You already know what I'm about to say, right Billy? Or are you stupider than you look?" Neil began. Billy rose. He knew the drill. "Go after your sister. Don't come home without her," he recited to his father on his way to the door, shrugging on his black leather jacket as he stepped out into the windy night. It was always the same.

Sitting in his car, Billy slammed the door and started up the radio. Tom Petty's *Change of Heart* blasted through the speakers as he sped out of the driveway. Driving along the road towards the Wheeler house- his usual first stop when looking for his sister- he continued listening to the first cassette tape he bought after moving to Indiana. At the time, buying a Tom Petty record seemed fitting, like a joke

that only he understood. Heartland rock in the heartland, how ironic. He rolled his eyes. Hearing it now, he couldn't stop thinking about his year here. He thought about school, and basketball, and his dad and new stepmom. He thought back to last summer, when they first arrived in Hawkins. He thought about Max, and about how he never liked her, but back then he wanted to look out for her, as if she needed some sort of protection from his dad.

He learned quickly that it was only him that his dad hated. Max could say or do whatever she wanted, and he often found that he was the one paying for it. He hated that kid, maybe more than he hated Susan. But no more than he hated his father.

Billy didn't even notice his accelerometer rising. He turned up the music that he hated and sped the car up even more. He thought back to his first day of school. His first basketball match, when he realized how inferior his new "team" was. He drove faster.

He thought about the first time Susan asked him to bring Max to the arcade. He thought about how, after he said no, his dad dragged him outside for a "talk".

Faster.

He thought about the night he went looking for her at the Byers's house. He thought about Steve Harrington.

Faster.

He hadn't checked the speedometer in some time when he topped a hill and saw something in the curved road ahead.

He blinked and saw the red hair before he even had time to process. When he realized what was happening, there was no time to hit the break. He swerved, seeing only her blue eyes in the headlights for one second. The next second, he saw nothing.

Max tried to move out of the way when she first saw headlights approaching behind her. She got as close to the shoulder as she could and slowed her bike, but she could hear the oncoming car accelerating. As she put her foot on the ground to stop her bike, she

turned just in time to see a flash of light and hear the screeching of tires followed by a loud crash. She dove out of the way, tumbling into the ditch on the side of the road. Getting her bearings and dusting the mud and grass off her light-wash jeans, Max climbed from the ditch and found her bike laying in the road, unscathed.

Moving her bike from the road, she grabbed a flashlight out of her backpack and walked to the other side of the road to get a look at the car that almost killed her. Even in the weak beam of light she could make out the front of her stepbrother's blue Camaro crumpled like paper against a tree.

"Billy!" She screamed, running towards the driver's side of the car. The windshield was shattered, and the airbags had deployed, but Billy wasn't there. "Billy!" she tried again, running around the tree to look for him, scared of what she was going to encounter.

"Billy!" Max was shrieking by now, trying to ignore the feeling of her heart beating in her head. "Billy!"

The Camaro's headlights were busted, but she could still see clearly when they began to flicker.

"Max," she heard, but she couldn't tell where it came from.

"Billy!" she cried again, "Billy, is that you? Billy, where are you?"

"Max," she heard him groan again, "I'm right here. Where are you?" Max hit the ground and shined her flashlight under his crumpled car. Nothing.

"I can't find you, Billy. I've looked everywhere, and I don't see you! Are you hiding? Are you okay? I swear to god, Billy, if you're trying to scare me just stop!" she sobbed.

Billy rolled over and looked up, realizing he was lying flat on his back in the dirt. He couldn't see much, but he could feel the blood dripping down his forehead and he could hear his stepsister calling to him. When he tried to lift himself up, he felt a stabbing sensation in his shoulder that radiated through his entire body and made him dizzy. Instinctively, he reached for it and fell back onto his back.

"Max, what's going on? Where's my car? What's all this shit floating around me?"

"Billy, where are you?" Max was searching the area around the car, looking for where he could've been thrown. "Keep calling to me and I'll find you!"

"I'm right here!" Billy cried, "I'm right by the tree! I'm right here!"

Max looked up and realized that she too was standing right by the tree. However, Billy was nowhere in sight.

"Billy," she started, after thinking for a moment, "did... did you say that there was, stuff floating around you?" It couldn't be possible, could it? The gate was closed. Eleven closed the gate. Things were normal again.

"Yeah," she heard him cough, "everything is dark and rotten. But there is... there's definitely some weird stuff in the air."

Max's stomach dropped.

This couldn't be happening. This wasn't happening.

"Billy," she said quietly, trying to hide that her voice was shaking, "you're not going to understand what I'm about to tell you. I'm going to get you, but I need you to do some things first."

"What the hell, Max, just come and help me up, wherever you are," Billy demanded, but Max stopped him, "Billy, I'm serious. I need you to listen to me."

"Fine, what?"

"First, if you're bleeding I need you to stop it. I need you to do whatever you can to make it stop. You have to do that Billy, can you?" The question was more like a plea. If her stepbrother really was where she thought he was, he had no idea what could be coming for him; it made it worse that she did.

Billy reached behind him with his good arm and felt around his back pocket until he found his red bandana. It hurt to move, but he

managed to pull it out and wipe the blood from his eyebrow. "Yeah Max, I'm working on it," he responded.

"Okay," Max said, still sobbing, "now, Bill, you're going to have to hide, okay?"

"Fuck, Max, you're not making any sense," Billy snapped impatiently, coughing again.

"I need you to hide, Billy," Max whimpered, "I promise I'm going to come back for you. I promise I'm going to help you, but I need you to hide. Can you move?" She asked weakly.

Billy pressed the bandana to his head with his hurt arm and rolled over onto the good one, steadying himself to stand up. When he was on his feet, he leaned himself against the tree for support.

"Yeah, I'm up. Kind of dizzy, but I'm standing."

"Okay Billy," Max said, trying to gain control of herself, "find somewhere to hide and stay there. I'm going to come back for you, I promise."

"I'll..." Billy started, trying to look around, "I... yeah, okay, just hurry Max. You're starting to freak me out."

2. Chapter 2: The Babysitter's Gone

Steve Harrington was seated in the recliner flipping through the channels on the TV when Dustin Henderson came through the front door, accompanied by his friend Lucas.

"Hey little turds," Steve called, "pizza's in the kitchen."

Steve had been babysitting Dustin for almost 6 months- only when his mom had to leave overnight- and in that brief time, had become his most unlikely mentor. In turn, though Steve would never admit it, Dustin had become one of the most influential people in his life. In their time together, it was Dustin who had encouraged Steve to apply to college, and it was Dustin to whom Steve first showed his acceptance letter from Ball State. Although it was bittersweet for Dustin that Steve would be leaving at the end of the summer, he was prouder of him than he could ever say.

Dustin and Lucas settled in on the couch and began scarfing down their slices of pepperoni while Steve asked the usual questions about their day.

"How was the campaign today?"

"Fine. We killed a bunch of goblins, and Lucas sucks," Dustin responded with pizza in his mouth.

"Let it go already!" Lucas exclaimed, elbowing him while Dustin laughed.

"I already knew that," Steve laughed.

"Oh, is it okay if Max comes over?" Dustin asked, only just remembering that his friend was on her way.

"I don't care, just let me know if you're planning on leaving the neighborhood," Steve said, not taking his eyes off the television.

"Good!" exclaimed Dustin, "Because she should be here any minute!"

Steve laughed again and got out of his seat to turn up the volume on

the TV, because *The Price is Right* had just returned from commercial break. Dustin reached down to the coffee table and turned his HT headset back on in anticipation of Max announcing her arrival. Almost immediately, her voice filled the room. "Dustin! Lucas! Are you there? Do you copy?" she was shouting.

"Whoa, hey Max, what's going on? Over." Dustin responded, taken aback.

"We have a 911. I don't... I don't know what's going on." Max sounded frantic enough that Steve turned off the TV and looked in their direction.

"Let me talk to her," he insisted to Dustin, who handed him the device, "Max, it's Steve, what's going on?"

"Over," Dustin hissed at Steve. "*Not important right now*," Steve hissed back.

"I'm almost there, just, I don't know, just come outside," Max responded.

Lucas looked at his friends, concerned, and asked, "Is she crying?"

For as long as he had known her, Lucas couldn't remember Max ever showing any fear. Occasionally she got angry, but even then, she mostly kept it to herself. He remembered the conversation the two had the night he told her the truth about Will Byers and the experiences he and his friends had lived through. Once Max realized Lucas was telling the truth, the dynamic completely changed between the two of them. Max wasn't very good at trust, but since that November afternoon, she had always trusted Lucas. By now, he knew everything about her past. He knew about how sad her mom had been throughout Max's entire childhood, and he knew that for a long time, Max blamed herself for it. He knew that her real dad was a "grade A piece of shit" who never could keep a job, and he knew about the day she and her mom finally walked away from him for good. He knew about her "friends" back home in California, who, despite Max's attempts at contacting them, would never respond to her letters. He even knew her biggest secret: before she moved to Indiana, Max had been an artistic gymnast.

He'd never forget the day he found that one out, when she tricked him into finishing her science homework for her. They were hanging out in his backyard while Lucas read *The Hobbit*. Max was seated with her legs crossed on a blanket scratching out something in a notebook when she looked up at Lucas with a cunning smile.

"Hey Stalker," she said, "want to finish this homework for me? I just hate physical science so much, and I know you're sooo good at it," she smiled at him.

"Ha-ha," he replied, rolling his eyes, "nice try. Do your own homework!"

"You're right, I should do it myself," Max sighed, looking down dramatically. She thought for a minute and looked up, as if a lightbulb had turned on inside her head.

"Hey, speaking of physical science," she began, "do you think there is a physical possibility that I could, I don't know, like, do a backflip right now?"

Lucas frowned, not looking up. "I don't know, Max, that's kind of an odd question."

"I want to try," she stated firmly, knowing she had caught his attention.

Her friend peered at her over his book, his eyes narrowed. "You can't just, *like*, do a backflip," he remarked in a shrill, mocking tone, bobbing his head, "you'll, *like*, break your neck."

Max leaned back on her hands, still looking at him. "No I wouldn't," she scoffed, playing dumb, "I mean, how hard could it be, really?"

"Um, yes, you would," Lucas said dismissively, "Even if you didn't break your neck, you'd injure yourself severely. And I can't take you to the hospital on my bike, so you'd be shit out of luck, now wouldn't you?"

"Wanna bet?" Max asked, cocking her head to the side.

"No, I don't want to bet!" Lucas exclaimed, throwing his hands up, "I

just want to read my book!"

"*Hah!*" Max chimed, "It's because you know you're wrong! That I could do it!"

"You couldn't," he said, matter-of-factly, cutting his eyes to her, "I *bet* that you couldn't." She had finally hit the right nerve.

"If I do, will you finish this homework for me?" she asked.

Lucas studied her. He wanted nothing more than to prove his over-confident friend wrong. What was the worst that could *really* happen to her if she tried it? A busted chin, maybe some bruises?

He extended his hand for them to shake on it.

Max stood, beaming, and walked with her hands by her side over to a level patch of grass. "Here goes nothing," she said, taking a deep breath. She held her arms straight out in front of her and stared intensely at the roof of Lucas's house, finding her spot. In one graceful motion, she executed a flawless standing back tuck.

Lucas's mouth gaped open.

"What. The. Hell," he muttered, aghast. No longer able to contain herself, Max burst into laughter. As Lucas stood, still amazed, she fell over on the ground howling.

"You played me!" Lucas shouted at her, "You knew you could do that all along!"

Max got up slowly, still cackling, and walked towards her friend. "Doesn't matter now, does it?" she teased, catching her breath before laughing some more. "You shook on it!"

Lucas never knew how he was supposed to feel about that day. On one hand, Max had totally sharked him, and he hated being played for a fool. But, on the other hand, she knew that showing him that would expose him to a personal detail about her past, and she let him see it anyway.

"Why haven't you ever told us that you're a gymnast?" Lucas recalled

asking her when they were sitting side-by-side on the porch.

"Because I'm not anymore," she explained to him, looking down and frowning, "There isn't a gym anywhere near Hawkins, so I can't be."

"That really sucks," he observed. Suddenly he understood where some of her angry disposition came from.

"Yeah," she said blankly, "it's been the worst part about coming here, for sure. The Summer Olympics were in California last year!" she lamented, "All my old teammates planned for months to go and watch together. That was our future we were going to be watching, and I was the best, Lucas. I was better than all of them," Max's voice shook, and she bit down hard on her lip, "And I wasn't there anymore. *I couldn't even go.*"

She looked up at him, raising her eyebrows for emphasis, "My *coach* was *there* when Mary Lou Retton won the all-around gold. Meanwhile I watched it on TV, hundreds of miles away on my living room floor."

"I'm really sorry Max," he said, looking in her light blue eyes, "that's so not fair." Lucas couldn't think of a non-creepy way to express how heart-broken he was for her, so he settled for resting a hand on her shoulder.

"Thanks," she sniffed, perking up, "but it's alright. Hawkins hasn't been *all* bad." She smiled at him.

"Oh yeah?" he asked, feigning confusion, "What are the not-so-bad parts?"

"Well definitely not you, Stalker," she retorted, elbowing him in the ribs while they both giggled.

The sound of the bell on Max's bike ringing outside snapped Lucas out of his memory.

The trio stepped out Dustin's front door just as Max rounded the corner, pedaling her bike up the hill in his driveway as fast as she could. Still crying, she threw her bike down and ran to her friends, who embraced her.

"What's going on, Max? What's wrong?" asked Lucas. Through her tears, Max sounded like she was trying to explain something but couldn't get it out.

Steve crouched down and took hold of her shoulders, "Hey kid. Take a breath. Look at me. What is wrong?"

Max's lip quivered as she looked up at him, "It's," she started to sob again, "It's Billy!"

Steve stood quickly, and looked her up and down, "Did he hurt you? Is he coming after you?" he demanded, ready to fight.

"No," Max cried, "he wrecked his car. And I can't find him anywhere! I think he may be, I don't," was all Steve could make out from her between her cries.

"Boys, get your shoes," Steve said, turning to Dustin and Lucas. He ran inside, grabbed his car key, and slipped on his shoes. He met the boys back under the carport and told Dustin to lock the house.

"Meet me and Max in my car," he instructed them, taking Max by the hand and walking her to his maroon BMW.

As Steve drove the kids towards Max's house, he couldn't help but think it strange how worried he was about Billy, this guy he hated. On the way, they tried to deduce the rest of what happened from Max. She told them about her seeing her stepbrother's car crash, and about running around looking for him. She explained how she was unable to find him, despite being able to hear him calling for her. Finally, she admitted her suspicion: somehow, Billy had ended up in the Upside Down.

"There's no way," Lucas told her, "he couldn't be, could he?" he asked, looking at Dustin.

"I mean, anything is possible," Dustin started, but when Max burst into tears again he added, "But I don't think he is. It's okay, Max. We're going to find him."

Max notified Steve when he was nearing the scene of the accident. Because there was no shoulder on the road, he pulled over as close as

he could get, but was several yards away from the site. Steve turned to the boys and said, "I know you two don't always take me seriously, but I mean it when I say I need you to stay in the car. We don't know what kind of condition Billy may be in and you kids are scarred enough already. I'll call for help if I need it to carry him, got it?"

He turned to Max. "You can come with me, but I need you to stay as far back as possible once we get to the car, understand?" Max nodded.

The boys, scared from Steve's uncharacteristic seriousness, watched their babysitter and friend walk from the car, Steve's nail-bat in hand. When they were out of sight, Dustin turned to Lucas, "Should we radio the others?"

Lucas shook his head. "Let's not until we're sure there is something wrong. We don't need to scare everyone for no reason, especially Will."

As Steve and Max walked towards the crashed car, she gripped his hand tighter.

"Hey Hargrove!" Steve shouted into the darkness, "Everything okay?"

When he wasn't met with a reply, he walked closer to the car, instructing Max to stay where she was. He shined his flashlight through the windows of the beaten-up Camaro, then bent over and peered under the car. Nothing.

"Billy!" Steve shouted, "Where are you?" No response.

As he rounded the tree, Steve felt something strike him from behind. He fell to the ground for only a second before getting back up with his bat, ready to fight. If this was Billy Hargrove's sick way of telling him to plant his feet again, Steve was actually going to kill him.

When he looked around, Steve found that somehow, he had lost sight of the crashed car. Where was he? Where was Max? He walked back in the direction he came from, his eyes scanning the trees for the crashed car. When he had been walking for a while and still hadn't seen any sign of the car, or Max, or anything, he started to worry.

"Max!" he called, gripping the bat tighter.

"Steve!" he heard her call back from somewhere that seemed distant, "Did you find him?"

"I can't find anything! Where are you?" Steve shouted, growing more nervous. The forest around him was beginning to seem different. Things were eerie, so he thought to start towards the road. He was so focused on finding Max that he didn't even notice the bulb in his flashlight had begun to flicker on and off.

"Max, meet me by the road," he called.

"I'm standing at the edge of the road right now!" Max yelled back, "Where are you, Steve?"

At this point, Steve had reached the road as well, only it wasn't the road he had just been driving on. This road was cracked and desolate, and none of the street lights were on. "Where the hell am I," Steve wondered aloud.

Max walked further down until she saw the lights from Steve's car. Lucas and Dustin noticed her and, assuming she and Steve needed help, got out of the car.

"What's going on?" Dustin asked as they walked towards Max, "Where is Steve? Is Billy okay?"

"He's gone too," Max said weakly, "I can't find Steve."

Dustin and Lucas darted back to Steve's car to grab flashlights, then ran towards Billy's crashed Camaro with Max.

"Steve!" Dustin shouted, "Where did you go?"

"I told you stay in the car!" Steve called back, "And I meant it, Dustin!" Steve was starting to worry knowing Dustin was nearby, but he resolved to stay calm and not let him hear it.

"You don't even know where you are," Lucas responded, "We're just trying to help!" The boys canvassed the area, shining their lights in every direction.

As Steve circled back towards where the wrecked car should have been against the tree, something caught his eye in the light of his flashlight. He spun around and examined it closer, realizing that it was just a fleck of something floating in the air. Looking around him, he realized that there were a lot of them.

This just couldn't be happening. There was no way.

Steve was trying to think of a reasonable explanation for the outrageous situation he was in when he first heard the all-too-familiar gurgling coming from somewhere nearby.

"No," Steve whispered to himself, "this isn't happening."

"Dustin," Steve commanded loudly, "you guys need to leave." His breathing had quickened as he spun around slowly, his eyes scanning for the monster he knew was approaching.

"That's ridiculous," yelled Dustin, still running through the trees looking for Steve, "we aren't going anywhere without you!"

"Listen to me, Dustin," Steve said, allowing some of his panic to seep through his voice, "I need you to get out of here. Max can drive my car. Go to Chief Hopper and tell him what's happening. But you can't stay here."

"Steve, I don't understand... this isn't..." Dustin called, growing more anxious, but Steve cut him off, "Dustin. I don't think I'm where you are anymore."

Dustin and Lucas exchanged a meaningful look. Max put a hand to her mouth, closing her eyes and crying for what seemed like the millionth time that evening.

Dustin felt hot tears run down his cheeks and realized he was crying too. "Steve," he pleaded, but couldn't finish whatever it was he wanted to say.

"Look little man," Steve called, "I'm going to be okay. I'm going to hang tight right here until you find a way to get to me. I'll be just fine," he assured him. "But right now, Dustin, you have to get Lucas and Max out of here. Get to Hopper, he'll know what to do."

Dustin stood by the crashed car, looking around hopelessly. "I'm coming back for you soon!" Dustin cried out to Steve, his voice breaking, "I'm going to come get you!"

"I know! I know you are, Dustin! But you have to go if you're going to do that! You have to get out of here!"

Dustin and his friends jogged to his babysitter's car, trembling with fear for Billy and now Steve. Dustin took Max by the shoulders and looked her in the eye. "Are you okay to drive us back to my house?" he asked her.

Max nodded, trying to get a grip.

As the three kids sped away in his car, Steve Harrington anticipated the attack at any moment. He was backing towards a tree when he turned around to find himself face to face with a Demogorgon.